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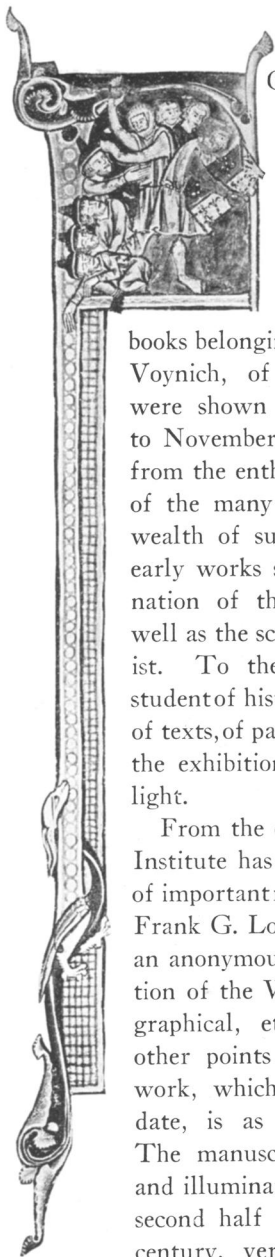
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THE VOYNICH COLLECTION



POPULAR interest in a special exhibition has seldom been greater than in the collection of manuscripts and early printed books belonging to Mr. W. M. Voynich, of London, which were shown from October 7 to November 3. It was clear from the enthusiastic comment of the many visitors that the wealth of suggestion in these early works stirred the imagination of the non-erudite as well as the scholar and the artist. To the bibliophile, the student of history, of languages, of texts, of painting and design, the exhibition was a rare delight.

From the collection the Art Institute has acquired a group of important manuscripts. Mrs. Frank G. Logan has presented an anonymous work, a Description of the World (from geographical, ethnological, and other points of view). The work, which is of mediaeval date, is as yet unpublished. The manuscript was written and illuminated in Paris in the second half of the fourteenth century, very likely for the Sorbonne.

Mrs. John J. Borland has given two manuscripts, a North Italian Book of Hours, written and illuminated in the

fourteenth century, and a Florentine manuscript of Horace's Art of Poetry and Letters, written and illuminated on fine Roman vellum about 1360. The miniatures in the Book of Hours are of very unusual character; some have silver ornament, and in one painting of the Crucifixion an unknown metal or amalgam has been used.

The several manuscripts purchased by the Art Institute will be reported in a subsequent number of the BULLETIN. Previous to the exhibition the Institute had acquired from Mr. Voynich a thirteenth century Latin Bible, of which several illustrations will be found in these pages. It is a Vulgate version, written and finely illuminated in England at the beginning of the thirteenth century. The decoration, which consists of about one hundred illuminated and historiated initials, is executed in a style characteristic of Canterbury work of this period.

The initials are in color on a gold or patterned ground and have extensions for the most part of rectangular shape or in the form of dragons. These extensions are filled with gold and various designs with dragon and foliage motives. The dragons are inside or curled around the extensions; the foliage usually has the leaves reversed in order to show the under side. Miniatures, bold of design, are set within the initials, in colors (blue, green and various tones of red) on a gold ground. One of their characteristic features is the use of red to touch up the cheeks and lips of the persons represented. Chapter numbers are set in the margins with filigree attachments in red and blue. The manuscript is in excellent

condition. It is bound in seventeenth century wooden boards, morocco covered.

The reproductions, inadequate as they are without color, give some idea of the variety of decoration of this Bible. The initial letter of this report is taken from the book of II Kings. The miniature shows armored Philistines taking the ark from the Israelites, whom they are slaying. One of the most interesting miniatures is shown in the illustration, on page 96, of a column from the prologue to Matthew. Above, Matthew and his angel are shown; below in a remarkable design, the tree of Jesse with five persons within the loops of the interlacing foliage; at the head of Jesse's bed, the ark of the covenant. A page of unusual variety of decoration is illustrated on page 98. John seated with closed book appears in the initial miniature of II John. The initial *S* with grotesque animals in the loops opens III John. The initial letter of Jude has a vertical miniature showing Jude standing with closed book, and above him towers with crosses. Opposite is a reproduction of a page from Haggai and Zachariah. In a vertical initial stands Haggai, a city above, a slave with bowed head below. The remaining miniature depicts the Temptation and Zachariah, and ends in a striking dragon extension.

Space does not permit more than the briefest mention of the Voynich exhibition as a whole. It falls into two distinct classes, manuscripts and printed books. The books, of great rarity and interest, have many illustrations, chiefly woodcuts, invaluable in the study of the development of graphic art. The manuscripts are English, French, German,

Italian, Flemish and Spanish, of the tenth to the fifteenth century. Among the most important is an unpublished and unsolved cipher manuscript by Roger Bacon, thirteenth century. The profuse illustrations give sufficient clue to establish the importance of the cipher content. A tenth century Spanish codex, one of a very few Spanish manuscripts of such antiquity, is especially important for its rich decoration with ornaments showing strong Irish and Moorish characteristics.

The finest treasures of the collection are an Archaeology of Rome and Italy, compiled by G. Marcanova; a treatise on military and naval matters by Pandolfo Malatesta, Duke of Rimini, and Roberto Volturio, his minister of war; and a fourteenth century Lives of Martyrs, containing three hundred water color sketches. The Archaeology, which was finished in 1465 for Novello Malatesta, is illustrated with drawings by Maso Finiguerra, the Florentine goldsmith and a pioneer in copper and silver plate engraving, and is a mine of information for the study of the archaeology of Italy, especially of Rome. The second volume, the greatest military manuscript of the Renaissance, has a striking feature, and one which has no connection with the manuscript, in a delightful full page painting attributed to Andrea Mantegna inserted in the middle of the volume. The unique book of the whole collection is the manuscript of the Lives of the Martyrs. The three hundred water color sketches added by a Florentine artist to the wide lower margins are clearly not the work of an illuminator; many authorities have attributed them to Giotto.